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A HISTORY OF THE SMITHFIELD GATE

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# A HISTORY OF THE SMITHFIELD GATE.



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# A HISTORY OF THE SMITHFIELD GATE

*Of the Parish of St. Bartholomew the Great, E.C.*

BY

E. A. WEBB, F.S.A.,

Churchwarden, and Honorary Secretary to the Restoration Committee.

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IN the south-east corner of West Smithfield, where the street, formerly known as Duck Lane, then as Duke Street and now as Little Britain begins, is an ancient gateway. It leads to St. Bartholomew the Great church or, by turning to the right, to Bartholomew Close.

This fragment is all that remains of the west façade of the church of the great Augustinian monastery of St. Bartholomew, West Smithfield.

It is a beautiful arch, and dates from the early 13th century. It exhibits the mouldings and the dog tooth ornament of that period, together with the corbels from which the mouldings spring, but those on the south side are hidden by the shelves of a stationer's shop.

It is probable that above the arch originally rose the south-west flanking tower of the west front of the church ; as the arch is over six feet in thickness, and must have been so built to support a considerable superstructure : we shall see later on additional evidence of this.



The first part of the priory church to be built was the choir and Lady Chapel, in the year 1123. On the death of Rahere the founder in 1144, his successor, Prior Thomas, continued the work and added the transepts, the crossing and one bay of the nave. About the year 1190 the nave was gradually continued westward, until it reached into Smithfield, where the present archway stands. Hitherto it has been supposed that the west front of the Priory Church stood where the present churchyard gates now stand, but in July 1905, the writer, by tunnelling under the pavement, was able to trace the south wall of the nave from the churchyard gates to the Smithfield archway, thus proving that the nave did extend to Smithfield. The exact date of the completion of the nave is not known.

Smithfield, which still retains its Anglo-Saxon name of "Smethfeld," the Smooth field, was the King's market, and a horse market was held here as early as the year 1174, and probably long before. We may suppose that stray horses and cattle had a way of wandering or bolting into the church through this archway (as being the side entrance, it would have been always open), for a low-walled enclosure was built outside the west front of the church, with an opening in the centre, the opening being protected by a chain. This low protecting wall is well seen in Agas' Map of London, made in the time of Queen Elizabeth. It is also referred to as "le cheyne" in the bounds of the parish, which were minutely described in 1544 in the particulars for the grant by Henry VIII. to Sir Richard Rich.

On the suppression of the monastery by the king in October, 1539, the nave was entirely destroyed and the stones carted away to some of the many buildings which

the king then had on hand. The west front of the nave went with the rest, save this one side portal. The reason for its escape from the general destruction no doubt was that it made a convenient gateway to the church, and, by the destruction of the guest house of the monastery, to the priory close still known as Bartholomew Close. Every entrance through the monastic walls, which form the present bounds of the parish of St. Bartholomew the Great, was guarded by gates (and with few exceptions, those gates and their attendant watchmen still remain), so that this old arched doorway formed a convenient place in which to hang one set of the parochial gates.

When, in 1544, Henry VIII. sold the whole parish to Sir Richard Rich, there were two rooms, one over the other, above the archway—rooms no doubt in the tower, and from that time the history of the archway can be fairly well traced.

#### THE OWNERSHIP OF THE PROPERTY OVER AND BESIDE THE ARCH.

In the early chancery proceedings in the time of Queen Elizabeth at the Record Office (an imperfectly explored mine of wealth of local history), the writer was fortunate enough to alight on the pleadings of two cases in chancery in the years 1590 and 1596, whereby the litigious rector of that time, David Dee, sought to show that a certain house in the Close had been granted to the rectors by Sir Richard Rich as a parsonage house and others as glebe houses, in addition to those which Rich had actually so granted under his settlement with the king. This caused one Philip Scudamore, an inhabitant of the parish, and who is commemorated by a

tablet in the north aisle of the church, to give a detailed description of his title to the rooms over the arch. He showed that, in 1544, the two rooms over the Smithfield Gate, one over the other, were at that time the freehold property of Sir Richard Rich by grant from the king, one John Smith then being the tenant; that on the 28th May in the same year he enfeoffed this John Smith as freeholder. In his will, dated 12th June, 1550, John Smith bequeathed the rooms to Margaret Miller, his sister, for her life, and after her death to her son John Miller. John Miller left the rooms at his death in 1571 to his second son, Richard Miller, who, on the 22nd July in the 36th year of Queen Elizabeth, enfeoffed Philip Scudamore, the defendant in the case, who then entered into possession, and was in possession of the property at the time of the suit. He, the vandal as we should now call him, in the next year, 1595, proceeded to pull down "the old decayed and ruyned edifices," as he styles them, one over the other, and to build new ones in their place. But we must be thankful to Scudamore for so carefully reciting his title as he has done, and for leaving us the following description of what he pulled down (it is upon this description and the thickness of the arch that the writer relies for the statement that there was a south-west tower with two rooms in it over the present gateway). Scudamore thus describes the rooms:—"Certaine chambers or rooms one over another, annceyently edified, builded, or standinge over and upon the same gate, on an arch of stone and two great mayne pillars of stone beringe upp the saide arche, chambers and rooms, and adjoyninge to the saide messuage (*i.e.*, the house adjoining, which had been part and parcel of the same property) and thereunto annexed." The arch of



stone, with one of the pillars corbled from the wall, can still be seen; the other is hidden by the stationer's shop.

From the above evidence it is clear that the rooms over the arch were never the property of the parish, as some people suppose.

The parish was the owner of the arch and the east side of the passage, for on the 18th September, 1690, we find William Crosfeild, churchwarden of the parish, granting by direction of the parishioners, a lease for 13 years to George Webb, a citizen and merchant taylor, of "all that shop or shed lying on the east side of the passage (south side must be intended, as the passage had no east side), together with the room or chamber lying over the gateway leading to the parish church of St. Bartholomew the Great, in or near West Smithfield," for the consideration of 20s. paid down and a yearly rent of 30s. for the use of the poor.

And on the 20th June, 1704, the two Churchwardens, with consent of the Vestry, granted a lease for six years to John Mitchell, citizen and pewterer, of "all that out-house or stable, together with the vault thereunto adjoining, situate and being on the south side of Webb's Coffee House, at the side of the passage or breeke leading from West Smithfield to Bartholomew Close, as also the room or closet over the said passage," at a yearly rent of £3.

On the 25th March, 1713, the two churchwardens, by order of the vestry, granted a lease of 20 years to William Mawhood of "all that piece of ground lying and being in a passage leading from the church into Smithfield near Duck Lane end (now Little Britain), and adjoining to the house wherein the said William Mawhood now liveth, containing in length from east to

west 22 ft. 8 in., and in breadth 4 ft. 4 in., upon which there now standeth a deal shed, and was late in the occupation of John Mitchell, deceased, and also all that room or chamber which is now built under the upper cavity of the arch of the old gate or arch of the entring into the said passage from Smithfield," at a yearly rent of 40s.

And further, the churchwardens pleased to Mawhood "all that piece of ground, nine inches in breadth and fifteen feet in length, the same being parish ground, whereon the wall on the north side of the house, wherein the said Wm. Mawhood now liveth, standeth, the same adjoining the shed hereinbefore described," for twenty years at a yearly rent of 20s.

The "room and chamber over the gateway" in the lease of 1690, and the "room or closet over the passage" in the lease of 1704, cannot be either of Scudamore's rooms over the arch, as they were never parish property. The description in the lease of 1713 is probably the correct one, a "room or chamber which is now built under the upper cavity of the arch of the old gate," which fairly describes the closet or cupboard which is still in the passage and entered by the first door shown on the engraving.

The lease of 1713 expired in 1733, but Mawhood continued in possession as an annual tenant until 1741, when the Vestry ordered that the shed be fitted up as a watch-house and cage.

On the 10th July, 1822, it was resolved by the Vestry to sell the shed to Sir William Rawlins for £50, and with the proceeds defray the cost of a special plan of the parish then nearly completed.

The parish also owned the tenement which is now that portion of the stationer's shop which blocks the south side of the arch. We first hear of it in 1705, when by order of the Vestry, on June 12th, the churchwardens, in consideration of £10, demised to Ralph Living "all that shed or tenement which was lately a scrivener's shop, situate at the end of Duck Lane, adjoining the 'Cock' public house, containing 6 ft. 9 in. north towards the gateway and 4 ft. 1½ in. east to a stone wall belonging to the said gateway, and south to a tenement in possession of the said Ralph Living, for 15 years at the yearly rent of £2 10 0," Living covenanting to divide the premises from his own with a substantial partition and door. The lease expired in 1720, and in 1725 the Vestry ordered "that Mr. Wm. Mawhood (who was then the proprietor of Living's house) be obliged to take a lease of that part fronting Smithfield which he holds of the parish, or quit the same at Midsummer next." In 1727 Mawhood took a lease for 15 years on the same terms as Ralph Living in 1705.

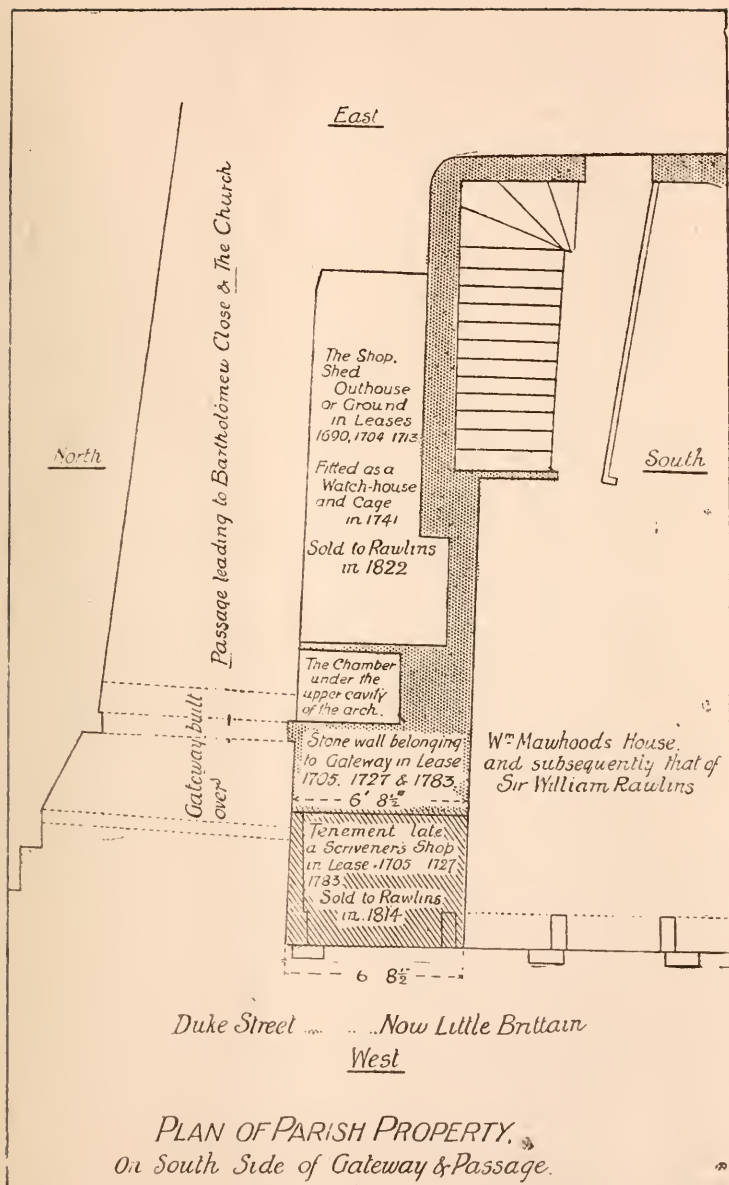
On the expiration of this lease in 1742, Mawhood continued to hold as an annual tenant until 1783, when, on the 10th March, the Churchwardens, by order of the Vestry, granted him another lease for 30 years at a yearly rental of £3, otherwise the terms were the same as before.

On the expiration of this lease in 1812, Chas. Mawhood, the then lessee, was offered a new 30 years' lease at a rental of £8. On his refusal he was called upon to separate the tenement from the dwelling-house; but this was not easy to do, for during the lease Mawhood's dwelling-house had been apparently brought forward and

built above the tenement. A lease of it at £10 a year was next offered to Sir William Rawlins, who was then the owner of Mawhood's dwelling-house, and on his refusal, the Vestry decided to submit for counsel's opinion the question as to the best way to preserve the interests of the parish in the tenement. Counsel advised that the tenement be sold, and as Sir Wm. Rawlins, the owner of the rest of the house, had offered £180 for it, this was accepted, and the conveyance signed 11th October, 1814. At that time the church clock had been made to strike the quarters, and a larger bell had been provided for the purpose, at a cost of £189. The Vestry, in February, 1815, thereupon decided that as the clock and bell were not only for the present, but also for the future inhabitants of the parish, the money received for the tenement should be appropriated for the payment of the clock and bell.

It is to be regretted that the parish thus sold both the shed and corner shop or tenement on the south side of the arch, but they seem to have acted with deliberation, and to the best of their knowledge at the time in the interest of the parish.

The archway had more than one narrow escape of being itself removed. Thus on August 5th, 1741, the question was put to the Vestry "whether a convenient coachway be made at the church gate leading from Smithfield to the Close," but it is to the credit of the Vestry that they unanimously decided in the negative. Again in 1814 counsel's opinion was taken as to whether, "in the event of its being found necessary to remove the arch because of decay or for any other reason," the liability to support the building above would fall upon the parishioners. Fortunately Mr. J. A. Park's opinion





was that the parishioners would be liable, to which opinion we may perhaps attribute the retention of the arch.

#### HISTORICAL.

The gateway as we see it to-day is traversed by a busy throng, always passing to and fro. It was so when first erected, and has been so ever since. Fitz-Stephan, writing about the year 1174, gives a very graphic account of the horse market and horse racing which took place in Smithfield in his day, and has been thus translated from the Latin :—

“ Here every Friday, unless it should happen to be one of the more solemn festivals, there is a celebrated rendezvous of fine horses brought thither to be sold. Thither come, either to look or to buy, a great number of persons resident in the City, Earls, Barons, Knights, and a swarm of citizens. ’Tis a pleasing sight to see the ambling nags so smoothly moving by raising and putting down, alternately, their two side feet together. In one part there are horses better adapted to Esquires, whose motion is rougher but yet expeditious ; these lift up and lay down the two opposite fore and hind feet together . . . . When a race is to be run a shout is immediately raised, and the common horses are ordered to withdraw out of the way . . . . The grand point is to prevent a competitor from getting before them. The horses on their part are not without emulation. They tremble, are impatient and continually in motion ; and at last, the signal once given, they strike, devour the course, hurrying along with unremitting velocity. The jockeys clap spurs to the willing horses, brandish their whips, and cheer them

with their cries. You would think that all things were in motion."

Bartholomew Fair, granted by Henry I. to the monastery in the year 1133, was held originally within the parish on the north side of the Church, in what is now called Cloth Fair; it soon overflowed into Smithfield and eventually became a veritable pandemonium. It was suppressed in 1853. A live cattle market as well as the Friday horse market was held here until the middle of the 19th century (1855). There were, on occasions, as many as 4,000 beasts and 30,000 sheep gathered together in Smithfield in one day.

In the Middle Ages, especially during the reigns of Edward III., Richard II., Henry IV. and Henry V., great jousts and tournaments were held in Smithfield with much ceremony and splendour, attracting the whole City to the spot. The approach from Newgate is still called Gilt-spur Street in commemoration of these jousts.

People from all parts found hospitality in the guest-house of the priory, and many would have passed thereto through this door of the church. Pope Alexander V., in his grant of indulgences dated the 27th August, 1409, "to all who on certain days visited and gave alms for the repair and upkeep of the monastery," gave as one of the reasons why money was required "that the monastery, being situate in a very famous place of the realm, very many resort thither from the realm and from divers other regions, to its grave burden."

In the year 1321, when the Barons rose against the Despencers, the favourites of Edward II., and marched upon London under the Earl of Hereford, Lord Hugh Audley and his followers were lodged at St. Bartholomew's, and it was at the monastery, presumably in the

great hall or guest-house there, that the meeting of the earls, barons and magnates took place.

In the year 1381 there was another rising, the great peasant revolt, under Wat Tyler. It was immediately in front of this Smithfield gateway that King Richard's men were drawn up, whilst Wat Tyler's were on the other side of Smithfield. It was after Wat Tyler had crossed the open space to this side to parley with the king, that he was struck down by Walworth, the mayor, and still living, his body was rudely dragged by his hands and feet, according to one chronicler, into the church of St. Bartholomew, and according to another into the hospital, where he was laid upon the master's bed. There he probably died before again being brought out to be decapitated.

Smithfield was the place of execution before Tyburn was so used, and many sorry sights must have been seen at the Elms on the other side of the square from the door of the monastery: none perhaps more shocking than the barbarous execution of Sir William Wallace, the Scotch patriot and hero, in the year 1305.

It was in front of this door that John Bradby was burnt as a heretic in the year 1409. It was through one of the west doors of St. Bartholomew's that the Blessed Sacrament was brought to him by Prior John Watford when the Prince of Wales, afterwards Henry V., personally pleaded with him to recant.

In the year 1546, after Henry VIII. had suppressed the monastery and destroyed the nave of the church, it was immediately in front of this gateway that the corporation of the city erected a stage from which Wriothesly, the chancellor, and others might view the burning of Anne Askew.

Nine years later and Queen Mary commenced to send the martyrs of her time to the stake. According to Strype, nine were burnt here in 1555, sixteen in 1556, and ten in each of the two next years, or forty-five in all.

Other atrocities in ways of execution were enacted in Smithfield, in front of this spot, upon which there is no pleasure to dwell.

A more pleasant topic is what happened here in the year of grace 1893. On June 5th, a guard of honour was drawn up in Smithfield to receive the Prince and Princess of Wales (our present King and Queen), accompanied by George, Duke of York (the present Prince of Wales), the Princess Victoria, and the Princess Maude, now the Queen of Norway. They and many other notable people that day passed through this Smithfield arch to testify their sympathy and approval of the great work of restoration that had taken place in the church, and to be present at the inauguration and dedication to the service of Almighty God of the restored church by Dr. Benson, Archbishop of Canterbury, and Dr. Temple, Bishop of London—a sympathy in the work and an honour which will always be affectionately remembered by all connected with it, and the more so because it was the first occasion on which Queen Alexandra had appeared in public since the lamented death of the prospective heir to the throne.

An effort is now being made to preserve in its present picturesque condition this gateway of the parish, this fragment of the monastery. It is the only example that London possesses of an early thirteenth century door. The owners of the property are trustees, and they ask for the house above the arch and six feet by the south of it, £1,875, the price fixed by their valuer. If acquired

it is proposed to preserve the house in its present picturesque condition, and a further £200 will be necessary to put it into a habitable condition.

Those who are willing to help forward this work are invited to send a contribution, large or small, to the Rector of the parish, the Rev. W. F. G. SANDWITH, 12A, Charterhouse Square, E.C.; or to the Treasurer, Sir F. D. DIXON-HARTLAND, Bt., M.P., at the London, City and Midland Bank, West Smithfield; or to E. A. WEBB, 60, Bartholomew Close, E.C.

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